

# franciscan

SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS

Volume 20

Number 1

January 2008

£2

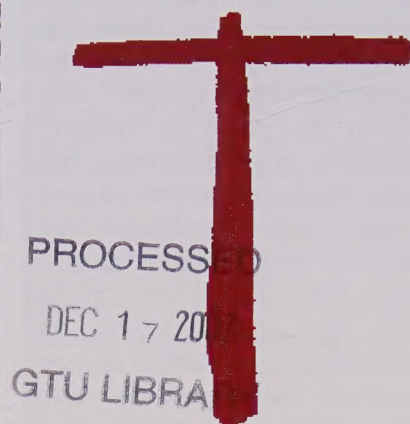


Francis at Prayer, at San Damiano, near Assisi



## A Rule for Hermitages

*Francis of Assisi*



### "Those who Live in Hermitages"

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Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most, four; let two of these be "the mother" and have two "sons" or at least one. Let the two who are "mothers" keep the life of Martha and the two "sons" the life of Mary and let one have one enclosure in which each one may have his cell in which he may pray and sleep.

And let them always recite Compline of the day immediately after sunset and strive to maintain silence, recite their Hours, rise for Matins, and *seek first the kingdom of God and His justice*. And let them recite Prime at the proper hour and, after Terce, they may end their silence, speak with and go to their mothers. And when it pleases them, they can beg alms from them as poor little ones out of love of the Lord God. And afterwards let them recite Sext, None and, at the proper hour, Vespers.

And they may not permit anyone to enter or eat in the enclosure where they dwell. Let those brothers who are the "mothers" strive to stay far from everyone and, because of obedience to their minister, protect their "sons" from everyone so that no one can speak with them. And those "sons" may not talk with anyone except with their "mothers" and with the minister and his custodian when it pleases them to visit with the Lord's blessing.

The "sons", however, may periodically assume the role of the "mothers", taking turns for a time as they have mutually decided. Let them strive to observe conscientiously and eagerly everything mentioned above.

Reprinted with permission from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol 1 edited by R.J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., J.A.W. Hellmann OFM Conv., & W.J. Short OFM. Published by New City Press, New York, London and Manila, 1999.



## "Those who Live in Hermitages"

Contrary to popular understanding of him Francis of Assisi was primarily a contemplative who drew his spiritual strength for travelling, preaching the gospel and serving the poor, by frequent withdrawal to the mountains and caves of central Italy to live as a hermit. He encouraged his followers in the same path - hence the treasure we call "A Rule for those Living in Hermitages", which brings together both solitude and community. In a time when vocations to the religious life in the Western world have sharply diminished it is noticeable how becoming a hermit has been a "growth industry". But perhaps it is not surprising that in a consumerist, noisy and stressful world people are discovering their need for withdrawal and prayer which can take many different forms. If you would like to explore further both the history and contemporary expressions of Franciscan hermit life we recommend "Franciscan Solitude" edited by Andre Cirino OFM and Josef Raischl (ISBN 157659 006 2) obtainable from the Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, Kent.

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The short document written by St Francis for 'those who wish to live in hermitages' is not really a rule, establishing or codifying a form of life within the then emerging Order of Friars Minor, but is rather some advice to those of his brothers who were already drawn to the eremitical life. Francis himself, as we know, spent much of his time (perhaps up to two thirds of every year) pursuing a contemplative pattern of prayer with small groups of brothers in out-of-the-way places; the Carceri high up on Monte Subasio above Assisi, and certain places in the Rieti Valley to the south, Greccio, Fonte Colombo, Poggio Bustone and La Foresta, were favourite locations of his. Other brothers certainly followed his example and Francis was moved to give guidance to this way of life.

What's striking in the Rule is that the eremitical life is clearly understood by Francis to be not an individual but a communal vocation; he stipulates that the hermitage should contain three or four brothers, enough to make a viable community. The daily offices, Matins, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline, are to be prayed together and meals are taken in common. This is not a private enterprise, an escape into solitude to find 'space' for oneself; rather, fraternity is an essential part of this eremitic way. Each brother is to have his own cell for personal prayer and for sleep, but, as a visit today to the Carceri reveals, the cells were little more than hollows in the rock of a larger cave and the brothers would not have lived far apart from each other. Silence is to be kept from after Compline but it is by no means total and some communication between the brothers is assumed. The enclosure is strict in that there's a warning against permitting others to enter or eat in the hermitage, yet the brothers living this life are seen as very much part of the wider fraternity of the Order; they are under the guidance and the discipline of the Minister and the Guardian who visit from time to time. This is not isolation from community but solitude within it.

Perhaps the most noted aspect of the Rule is its stipulation that in this little hermit community two of the brothers should be 'the mother' while the other two live as 'sons'. The 'mothers' should keep the life of Martha, i.e. serving, cooking, cleaning etc, while the 'sons' should follow the life of Mary, sitting at the feet of the Lord in contemplative attention and prayer (Luke 10.42). Throughout the Middle Ages the model of Mary and Martha had been used to distinguish the vocation of the religious who had withdrawn from the world and who was

## St. Francis' Rule for Hermitages

**Samuel SSF**

therefore free to be wholly attentive to the Lord, from that of the 'secular' Christian involved in the affairs and concerns of the world; the vocation of the 'Marys' being considered higher than that of 'Marthas'. Francis, however, makes no such hierarchical distinction. The 'sons' who are focussing primarily on contemplative prayer are to be dependent upon their 'mothers', 'beg[ging] alms from them as poor little ones out of the love of the Lord God', and periodically the roles would be reversed so that those who had withdrawn for a time of intense prayer took their turn in serving while the others were left free to go deeper into contemplation. Thus any hint of 'religious competitiveness' is dispelled by the mutual care and support required among the brethren; both the contemplative and the more active life are integrated within the hermitage. Poverty and humility, as in the rest of the Order, are to be paramount. The Rule ends with Francis exhorting the brothers to 'strive to observe conscientiously and eagerly everything mentioned above'. Desire is the foundation of this way of life, a desire for God in the context of intimate fraternity in which the brothers are reminded that they are dependant upon each other and owe each other mutual love and obedience.

Thomas Merton, in his essay 'Franciscan Eremiticism', writes that 'the importance [of Francis' Rule for Hermitages] lies in the spirit which it exhales, a spirit of simplicity and charity which pervades even the life of solitary contemplation'. There are no austerities or penances outlined which the hermits must perform, how many hours must be devoted to prayer etc,....'Francis simply communicates the atmosphere of love which is to form the ideal climate of prayer in the hermitage'. This is a prescription not for eccentric piety nor for reclusive introversion, but for a fraternal way of life in which the brothers may know that the authenticity of their prayer is measured by the humble care and love that they give to one another. *f*



**Samuel SSF**



# An Experience of Franciscan Solitude

Patricia Jordan FSM



What has a medieval rule for Hermitages to say to a person in the twenty-first century? The answer to that vital question has had tremendous consequences not only for our congregation of Franciscan Sisters Minoress but also for the many guest hermits who

have availed themselves of our purpose-built Portiuncula, a House of Franciscan Prayer and Solitude. St Francis reminded his followers: God in his mercy has called us not for our own good alone but for the good of the many. Since building our Portiuncula at Clay Cross in rural Derbyshire, this has been our experience: the good of the many.



Frontage of the Portiuncula at Clay Cross

The building of the Portiuncula and the new hermitage ministry associated with it was the result of many years of prayerful discernment and academic research. As a Congregation we became aware of a need to explore the eremitical dimension of our Franciscan charism. It was a very exciting and adventurous journey that eventually resulted in taking a great leap of faith to build and provide our particular interpretation of St Francis' Rule for Hermitages. We were encouraged by the words of Pope John Paul II in a document addressed to religious entitled *Vita Consecrata*. In this document the Pope emphasized not only fidelity to the founding charism but also creativity in interpreting it for present day needs. Our experience since opening in 2005

regardless of age, creed or culture. This dichotomy between active ministry and personal prayer goes back to Jesus. We are all familiar with the story of Martha and Mary recorded in St Luke's Gospel 10.38-42. St Francis, too, had to struggle with this tension in his own life and the way he resolved it continues to challenge both the Marthas and the Marys among us. For Francis it was not an either/or decision,

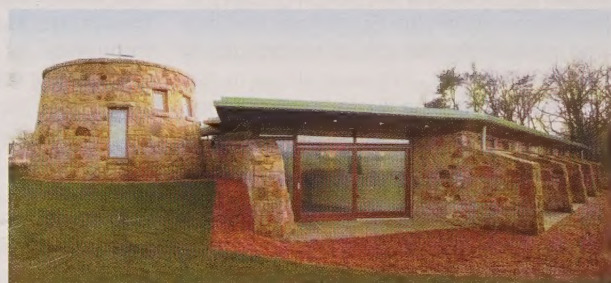
rather it was a both/and choice that lovingly integrates a rhythm in life that makes space for the personal and intimate as well as the total dedication to loving service of one's brothers and sisters.

Realising that the call to solitude lies at the heart of our Franciscan vocation, the Franciscan family continues to discover new ways of interpreting and living the Rule for Hermitages. Our Portiuncula is one example among many. I speak from the experience of having travelled to several countries to explore the eremitical dimension of our Franciscan calling. The originality and creative fidelity to Franciscan eremiticism reflects the originality and creativity that first prompted Francis to write his precious little Rule for Hermitages. We have tried to preserve the spirit of contemplative prayer, littleness, loving service, gospel simplicity, and warm fraternity as the hallmarks of our hermitage experience. The relational dimension captured by St Francis in nurturing the mother-son relationship, inherent in fulfilling and integrating the role of both Martha and Mary, is central to our interpretation of the Rule.

The actual design of the Portiuncula building integrates the Martha and Mary dimension in a way that is unique and creative with a meaning and relevance for twenty-first century people. It is not possible adequately to convey this in words. It has to be seen and

experienced. Therefore, if you feel the call to solitude, we lovingly invite you to 'Come and See'. We offer a minimum residential stay of two nights and a maximum of eight nights. We also offer non-residential days. Those who visit may have a sister-companion to accompany them in their solitude experience. One to one meetings are built into the individual's timetable. However, a guest-hermit may wish to spend the whole time in solitude without a Sister-companion. We respect each person's journey and desire only to facilitate the working of the Holy Spirit in whatever way meets individual need.

We have five hermitages under one roof: Greccio, Poggio Bustoni, The Carceri, Fonte Colombo and La Verna. In the company of St. Francis, each guest hermit is invited and challenged to explore the spirituality of a particular hermitage by journeying into the depths of one's heart and into the heart of God. Being Third Order Regular Franciscans, we share with all Third Order Franciscans the charism of conversion of heart. Therefore, from the outset we knew the "heart" would have a central focus in the spirituality of the Portiuncula. Aware of the primacy given to the heart by Jesus and by St. Francis - and indeed by so many of the Early Fathers of the Church



Portiuncula from the back, showing the hermitages

and the Desert Fathers and Mothers, we too emphasize the centrality of the heart in the journey towards wholeness and transformation in Christ.

Out of his own need and experience, Francis risked the journey into his own heart. It led him to total identification with the heart of Christ and forged in him a deep, compassionate love for all his brothers and sisters and for the whole of creation. Solitude was crucial in this process of transformation and surrender of the lover to his Beloved. The rhythm that St. Francis revered in his own life is his legacy to us in a way that challenges us to read the signs of the times and creatively do what is ours to do. Rooted and grounded in love, St. Francis developed a contemplative attitude to life that was nurtured in solitude and made fruitful in active ministry to his sisters and brothers in the cloister of the world. The

*Continued on page 6*

*Realising that the call to solitude lies at the heart of our Franciscan vocation, the Franciscan family continues to discover new ways of interpreting and living the Rule for Hermitages. Our Portiuncula is one example among many.*

confirms that the legacy we have received from St Francis in the Rule for Hermitages is much needed today, as it continues to fulfill a hunger in the human heart.

Our discernment and research centred on the active - contemplative tension that seems to surface in the lives of individuals, communities and societies,





# A Franciscan Hermitage in the Australian Bush

Wayne LBF

**Brother Geoffrey, Brother Howard and I came to this little valley twenty years ago, in the rocky foothills of the Great Dividing Range on the east coast of Australia. The locals describe it as "rubbish country, where the country is so poor that even the wallabies have to take their picnic lunch". We all came with considerable experience of the Religious Life as Franciscan Brothers; for me it had been twenty years.**

Our early days were focused on creating a place where we could live and develop the lifestyle that we felt we were being called into. At the very beginning we experienced what it means to step out in faith. We had only enough money to put a deposit on the land - which we did - and had a month to pay the rest. Then Our Lord met us and provided for us in ways that we could not have foreseen. In his Rule for Hermitages Francis says, "Their first care should be to strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." (Matt. 6: 24-34)

There was nothing on our land by way of fences or buildings; nothing but the bush and a creek. We began with a borrowed tent that leaked, followed by a borrowed caravan. Then in the next year we were able to erect a simple building in which to live. We slowly established the basics including our own individual hermitages and a rhythm of life. At this stage we began to revisit and explore the history of hermitages within the Franciscan tradition and in particular the role of hermitages in the life of Francis. We were struck by the fact that the Rule he wrote for hermitages reflected what we intuitively and by guidance had developed here.

Francis' concept for a hermitage was that it should not be large, nor was it to be a hermitage of just one hermit, but a genuine small fraternity of three or at the most four brothers living together.

One of the things we have experienced as a community of three is our total dependence on each other. Each Brother is essential and valued for his contribution, whether it is his skill in making jam and marmalade for sale; building; caring for the sheep and goats;

or working in the apiary. The bonds between us are deepened and our love for each grows as we experience the good times, as well as bushfires and droughts, not only in physical reality, but also in our inner life and journey as individuals and together as Brothers.

In the Rule there is no appointed leader, there is rather, an ongoing interchange of roles between those who withdraw for solitude and prayer and those who serve, using the Gospel image of Martha and Mary. Here we see a very delicate balance of roles and functions which are put in place to nurture the life of prayer of the fraternity and the individual. For us therefore, authority resides in the Life Professed of the fraternity: it is in the collective wisdom, spiritual maturity, graces and gifts of the Brothers who are responsible for the well-being of the individual and the community.

Days off and social times with laughter, and meals together with each other and friends are important. The number and frequency of visitors does however change the focus of the daily life. The occasional late night over an extended meal is fun, but it soon becomes obvious that it affects the next morning's silent hour of prayer at dawn.

It is for this reason that we have built our Guest Cottage to accommodate just one person. Other visitors not staying with us are asked to prearrange their visits and then we only invite one to three who join us for Midday Office and lunch, on Sundays.

Outside commitments needed to be seen in a similar light. As we become better known, we receive a growing number of invitations to attend important events in the lives of friends and in the church - weddings, birthdays, baptisms, ordinations, synods, funerals, inductions, etc. We decided that rather than being physically present, we would make time and space in our lives to pray for the particular event.

It is in the light of all this that we came to understand the section in the Rule on enclosure and those outside the community. Like the athlete, the writer, the warrior, or any other skilled person, we need to bring into both our individual and community lives a commitment to

our primary task. Anyone who is serious about their particular craft or profession makes it their focus and priority. For us manual work, silence, community and times alone in our hermitages, and the Liturgy of the Hours, are central to our way of life.

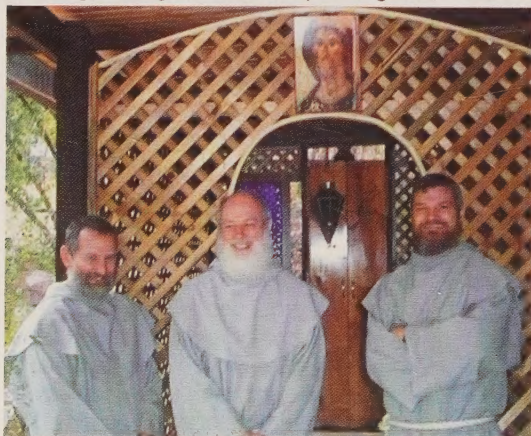
In his Rule, Francis sets the rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours as the focus for the prayer life of the hermitage. This is the natural cycle of each day when with psalms, hymns and scripture we refocus our attention and spend time with the One we love and who loves us. We have developed our own Office Book because of our need to have material which is both contemplative and Franciscan in the Offices. Praying, listening, and reflecting on the text of the Offices is an important source for renewing and deepening the charism within each one of us.

The time spent by Brothers in solitude is arranged among ourselves with one brother spending four months of the year apart in his hermitage with limited contact with others. There are different reasons for seeking solitude. There are those who seek solitude as a relief from their frenetic and busy lifestyles in the city with its crowds, noise, stress of the workplace and hectic social life. They seek times and places of solitude for rest and renewal. Then there are those who seek solitude in order to find someone, as Thomas Merton attests:

"The great joy in the solitary life is not found simply in quiet in the beauty and peace of nature, or in the song of birds, or even in the peace of one's own heart. It resides in the awakening and the attuning of the inmost heart to the voice of God - to the inexplicable, quiet, definite inner certitude of one's call to obey Him, to hear Him, to love Him, and worship Him here, now, today, in silence and alone. It is the realisation that this is the whole reason for one's existence."

A deep longing for God is central to our way of life, and in Christ we see the perfect expression of God's longing and love for us. We seek to deepen our relationship with God through prayer, manual work, community, and times of being alone in our hermitages. As a community of Brothers in our fragile human condition, we strive to live simply the Rule written by Saint Francis for "those who live in hermitages". *f*

**Wayne LBF has been a Franciscan brother for forty years, of which twenty have been spent at the Franciscan Hermitage of the Little Brothers of Francis, Eremophila, Tabulam. NSW 2469 Australia.**



**Geoffrey, Wayne and Howard at Eremophila**



# "Let us bless the Lord, living and true"

## The Prayer of Francis and the Early Brothers

Colin Wilfred SSF



On a recent visit to Assisi, I again found one of the most moving relics of Francis of Assisi is his prayer book, the thirteenth century breviary closely written and battered by constant use, treasured for centuries by the Poor Clares to whom it was given by Br Leo,

Francis' companion and secretary. As the Rule for Hermitages reminds us, the prayer life of the early brothers was built round the prayer of the daily office; indeed together with the readings heard at Mass it provided their only immediate access to the scriptures and the writings of the early church fathers.

The Earlier Rule (slowly compiled through experience during 1209-1221) tells us that "all the brothers, whether clerical or lay, recite the divine office, the praises and the prayers, as is required of them" (FA:ED 1.65) [All text references are taken from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol 1 edited by Armstrong, Hellman and Short]. Well, we know what the divine office was - it was the portable form devised for the travelling officials of the papal court, which the Franciscans greatly popularised. But what are the 'praises and prayers' to which the brothers were also committed? Fortunately, we have some twenty prayer texts which scholars judge as authentic and deriving from Francis although, as with many of the texts ascribed to him, he needed a secretary to write them down, (his Latin wasn't too good!) and he often incorporated ideas and words from brothers around him. We can see that every prayer bar one is in plural form. The only exception is the 'Prayer before the Crucifix' of San Damiano which is first person singular and probably dates from 1205/6, the beginning of the process of Francis' conversion.

When we come to ask the question what kind of prayers are they - these prayers of Francis, some of which formed part of the daily devotions of the brothers, presumably learnt by heart for an itinerant and begging life? We get some kind of

answer from analysing the words used. Yes, as we would expect, the word 'pray' comes frequently (25 times), more surprisingly the standard words for prayer are infrequent: contemplate (1), meditate (2), supplicate (2), intercede (2). The words which are used are: adore (20), honour (25), praise (26), magnify (6), exalt (12), give thanks (21), bless (15), glorify (2), serve (7). So, it is quite clear that the prayer life of the early brothers was centred around the recognition of God's gifts to them and all creation and their responsive role was both in the deepening of their sense of praise and thanksgiving and through the service of identification with those excluded from the power and possessions of the city and commune of Assisi. The response did not take one of the existing forms of monastic life but rather the lifestyle of the many penitential movements of their time.

*Let us give back all  
good to the Lord*

The Earlier Rule (FA:ED1.63-86) concludes with an extraordinary paean of praise and thanksgiving which runs to 165 lines in the modern edition and has been used as a basis for compiling a Franciscan eucharistic prayer.

The Earlier Rule describes the content of the life in which this spirituality of praise is to be lived out. After "selling all his belongings" and "giving everything to the poor" the brothers are to live the Gospel and as wanderers to be agents of peace both in their own society and beyond, for example with non-believers and "Saracens". They earn their living through the work of their own hands for what is necessary for them and to help feed the sick especially lepers. They are to be "lesser brothers" who do not own the places where they dwell, dress poorly, refuse ownership, exercise no power, and above all they identify with the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside (cf FA:ED1.70).

Of course, it was a constant struggle to maintain this level of commitment. It is



clear from the Earlier Rule that what we might call 'devotional practices': daily office, Mass, fasting, praises and prayers were seen as a constant reaffirmation of the values of Francis and the ever-increasing number of brothers and sisters who formed what we might call the Franciscan movement - only later would it take the form of the three Orders. Chapter 23 of the Earlier Rule (FA:ED1.79-81), largely made up of a selection of verses from the Gospels, shows how difficult it was, in Francis' words "to walk in the footsteps of Jesus" rather than returning to the world and the values of Assisi. As David Flood OFM comments, "Their prayer kept their minds from becoming entangled in the world. It withdrew their inchoate self from the press of society and kept it subject to God's action in the world" (*Francis and the Franciscan Movement*). It was precisely to help and sustain this attitude that Francis wrote the "Rule for those who live in Hermitages".

If there is one word which encapsulates what Francis and Franciscans believe is the most characteristic description of God, it is the simple word *good*: "Let us give back all good to the Lord - acknowledge that every good is his, and thank him from whom all good comes, for everything ... all thanks and glory, to whom all good belongs, he who alone is good. When we see or hear evil spoken or done or God blasphemed, let us bless and do good and praise God who is blessed forever". (Earlier Rule Ch 17 - FA:ED 1.76). Sacred and secular are not

*Continued on page 7*



Colin Wilfred SSF lives at the Canterbury friary and is responsible for ongoing formation in the European Province of SSF.



Continued from page 3

journey into his own heart made Francis realise that 'Brother Body is our cell, and our soul is the hermit who dwells within it, to pray to God and meditate. If the soul does not live in peace and solitude in its cell, a cell made by hands profits a religious little'.

Perhaps it is in the experience of solitude we learn the art of living in peace within ourselves in the loving surrender that is forever associated with the lure of the desert and the heart's journey.

I have completed a doctoral thesis on *The Spirituality of the Heart in the context of the Franciscan Eremitical Tradition*. A Scriptural understanding of "heart", "desert" and "conversion" is the basis of this, both historically and in the present day. I have written two books based on that thesis and these are directly related to the Franciscan hermitage experience. There our hearts are exposed to the personal, passionate, unconditional and lavish love of God. There we are challenged, changed, purified and sanctified. As we lovingly surrender, the Holy Spirit leads us to total union with God in Christ in the intimacy of transforming love. If you wish to explore this further the books will be available from Gracewing Publishers in February 2008. The first is called *An Affair of the Heart* (ISBN 978 085244 690 4); the second is called *Come Apart and Rest for a While* (ISBN 978 085244 691 1).

I wish to conclude this article in the words of our *Third Order Regular Rule*:

"The brothers and sisters whom the Lord has called to a life of contemplation should show forth their dedication to God with renewed joy each day and celebrate the love which the Father has for the whole world, who created us, redeemed us and who out of his mercy alone will save us." f



**Patricia Jordan** is a Franciscan Sister Minoress and is currently Director of The Portiuncula and Novice Mistress and Director of Formation within her Congregation.

Email: [info@stclaresconvent.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:info@stclaresconvent.fsnet.co.uk)

## Compton Durville 2008

**Quiet Days** from 10 – 4

(Please bring a packed lunch)

**Lent Quiet Day: Friday 29 February**

repeated on **Saturday 1 March**

*The Humility of God*

**Saturday 5 July**

*THIS is the day*

**Gardeners Practical and Prayerful:**

**1 - 6 April**

**6 - 11 May**

**Holy Week and Easter**

**15 - 23 March**

*Priest for the Triduum: A sister CSF*

**Please book for all the above events.**

**Individually Guided Retreats**

are available by arrangement

**Open Afternoon**

**Saturday 24 May**

Self-catering accommodation available

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Tel 01460 240473

or email

[comptondurvillecsf@franciscans.org.uk](mailto:comptondurvillecsf@franciscans.org.uk)

## Hilfield Friary 2008

**Weekend Retreats at the Friary**

**15 - 17 February**

*All may of Thee partake: George  
Herbert's path of prayer and praise  
led by Bart SSF*

**29 February - 2 March**

*Love so Amazing, so Divine  
led by Jason Robert SSF*

**18 - 20 April**

*Clear Mind, Open Heart:  
a meditation retreat  
led by Nicholas Alan SSF*

For bookings, contact the Guest Brother  
Tel 01300 342 313

or email

[hilfieldguests@franciscans.org.uk](mailto:hilfieldguests@franciscans.org.uk)

**Hilfield Project Weekend Events**

**22 - 24 February**

*Living in a Fragile World*

**11 - 13 April**

*Justice and the Love of God*

**25 - 27 April**

*Rogation Weekend: A Sense of Place*

For bookings contact:

The Development Officer.

Project Tel: 01300 341 741

[hilfieldproject@franciscans.org.uk](mailto:hilfieldproject@franciscans.org.uk)

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(published three times a year)

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The European Province  
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ISSN 0532/579X

Printed at *The Friary Press*, Dorchester



## Minister's Letter

*Sister Helen Julian CSF  
Minister Provincial of the First Order Sisters,  
European Province, writes:*

Dear Friends,

'Presence and Engagement' is the title of a report on the church's task in a multi faith society, debated at the General Synod in July 2005. It was also the theme of a sermon preached by the Bishop of Leicester in July 2007 at a welcome service for the two sisters who have recently gone to live in Leicester, starting a new CSF presence in that city. We are grateful to the diocese and the parish for their invitation, and their welcome.

Christine James and Moyra arrived at the end of June and moved into a flat on the St Matthew's Estate, part of the parish of the Resurrection. The estate is at the city centre end of this wedge shaped parish. It is home to a very varied population, ethnically and religiously, with many children and a recent influx of Somali refugees, and is materially poor. The sisters are living in a former pub, which is also home to a children's project, and a chapel used by the parish for some of its services. There is no church building on the estate, and so our sisters are 'the church presence'. And their first task has been simply to be present, to pray, and to get to know the neighbourhood, so that they may discern what kind of engagement will be appropriate.

The church's report valued this kind of presence. "In an increasingly fragmented and fluid society a stable presence is a powerful and counter cultural symbol of the unchanging love

of God for humanity. Continued presence in a physical neighbourhood can be a particularly powerful sign with an undiminished potential to be an authentic expression of what it is to engage with otherness from in the midst."

When C of E parishes are ranked in order of the proportion of 'parishioners' of faiths other than Christianity, this particular parish is among the top ten in the country. From the 2001 Census figures, three of the top ten parishes in this category were in the diocese of Leicester; and others with a high percentage included Birmingham and London, in both of which sisters and brothers have a presence. But this is not a phenomenon confined to only a few dioceses; there were, from the 2001 figures, 900 parishes in 35 dioceses where at least 10% of the population were from faiths other than Christianity, of which 228 had between 25% and 50%, and 62 had over 50%. These figures have undoubtedly increased since the Census.

This could seem threatening; but in fact the report found "more hope than anxiety, more creativity than stagnation and more generosity than resentment." It went on to speak of its discovery "of the way in which the gospel continues as ever to be alive, attractive and compelling when we engage with it in the context of otherness and diversity. Not only are others changed, but just as important, we ourselves are changed, enlarged and energised."



We in CSF hope that our presence in Leicester will in some measure "change, enlarge and energise" us. Perhaps this can also be a hope for our church as we approach the Lambeth Conference later in 2008, and grapple with the otherness and diversity within the Anglican Communion? And more parochially, as we in the Society of St Francis continue to seek to discern future shapes for the religious life, as we continue to explore ways of others living with us and alongside us in some of our houses, may we find our way of living the gospel made more alive, attractive and compelling by the challenges which others bring us, and the insights they share with us.

Pax et bonum - Peace and all good

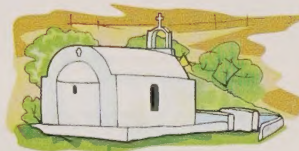
*Helen Julian CSF*

*Continued from page 5*

to be divided or one thought to be better than the other. Each is the location of God's activity and God's call to each of us to share in the process of returning all good things, all creation, to its loving Creator. Prayer and life are interwoven in terms of love and service and are expressed through adoration, praise and giving glory. There is no time or place where prayer and praise cannot be lived and in the doing of it we become part of that furnace of love and service, which the creation and every human being mirrors, which we call the Triune God.

"Wherever we are, in every place, at every hour, at every time of the day, everyday and continually, let all of us truly and humbly believe, hold in our heart and love, honour, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks to the Most High and Supreme Eternal God, Trinity and Unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of all, Saviour of all who believe and hope in Him and love Him" (Earlier Rule Ch 23 [FA:ED1.85-86]). f

## Theme Prayer



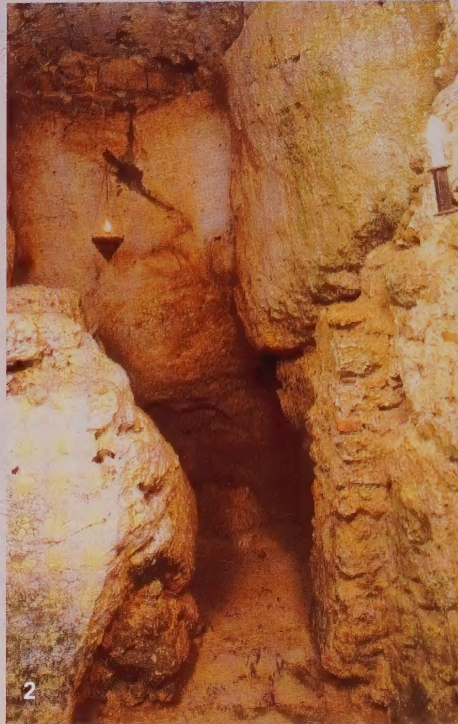
**Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast on the foundation that  
cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold  
the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always.**

*The Daily Office SSF page 293*



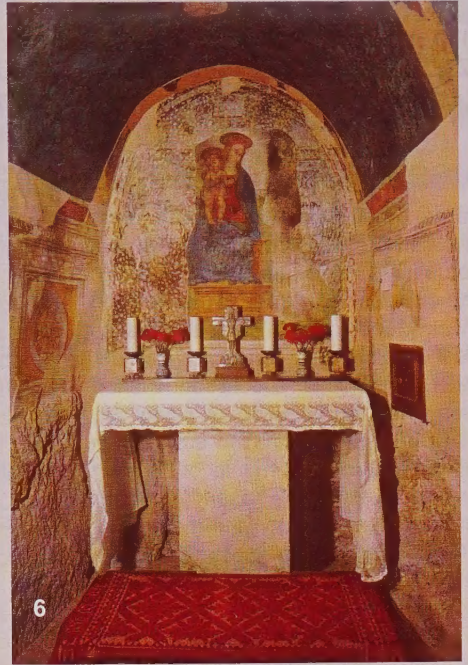
# Franciscan Hermitage

(1) A window at Fontecolombo shows Francis in his hermitage hut. (2) The cave used by Saint Francis at La Foresta near Rieti. (3) Also near Rieti is Fontecolombo with this small chapel used by Francis and the first brothers. (4) One wall of the refectory at Greccio is the rock of the mountainside and the space beyond is the sleeping space of Francis and the brothers. (5) The most well known of the hermitages is the Carceri above Assisi, seen here in winter. Most of the buildings are later than Francis' time, built over the caves used by Francis and the brothers but (6) the tiny chapel is original. In CSF, there are currently several sisters living as solitary hermits, and brothers have done so in the past; however, (7) Austin and Nicholas Alan lived the Rule for Hermitages at Burghwallis from 2000-2003. Moving to the other side of the world, (8) we travel down a rough track to Eremophila, in northern New South Wales to the hermitage of the Little Brothers of Francis - the guest house is on the left; photo 9 is the community space with the kitchen and prayer room. (10) A family of rock wallabies have adopted the brothers! (11) The prayer of the brothers is partly corporate in the prayer room, or in the solitude of the separate hermitages deeper in the bush. (12) A fresco of Francis at prayer in the hermitage at Greccio receiving the assurance of God's pardoning love.





# s Past and Present





# Community Routes

## ◆◆ Franciscan

### Presence in Kuching

There have been various attempts made to establish the Religious Life in Borneo. Bishop William Mounsey CR, the fourth Bishop of the then Diocese of Labuan and Sarawak (1909 to 1916) was the first to suggest a missionary Order for Borneo. In 1931, under his successor, Bishop Danson, the Congregation of Jesus the Good Shepherd (CJGS) started in Sandakan and the Community of the Holy Cross in Betong. Presently Sister Margaret is the only surviving member of the CJGS, based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The Community of the Holy Cross was short-lived. The Community of the Resurrection went to Borneo from England in 1934 but they had to withdraw in 1937.

In 1952, **Fr Eric Scott** came to Sarawak. He became the first member of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis in Sarawak. In 1962 **Donald SSF** was the first friar of the Society of Saint Francis to conduct a mission in Kuching, Sarawak and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. In 1972 **Geoffrey SSF**, the then Minister General SSF, visited Kuching, and on subsequent visits built up the Third Order. Presently there are nine tertiaries and two companions. In 1973 **Brian SSF** conducted missions in Kuching and Miri. In 1981 **Noel Thomas SSF** conducted the Diocesan Clergy Retreat and in 1989 **Alfred BoonKong SSF**, (originally from Kuching but living in the ANZ Province), became the first Malaysian to make his life profession in SSF. He was invited to teach at the House of Epiphany, Kuching, the theological college, from 1998 to 2003. In 2005 **Jennifer Chan**, (also from Kuching and a former SSF Tertiary) became the first Malaysian to make her profession in CSF. In August 2006 the then Bishop of the Diocese of Kuching invited Jennifer, (then living in the European Province of CSF), for two years' secondment, generously providing

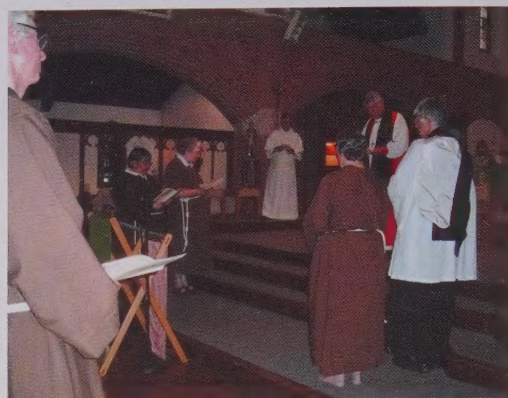
her with accommodation and an allowance.

The Anglican Church in Borneo started on 29 June 1848, Saint Peter's Day, with the landing in Kuching of a thirty-year-old surgeon and priest, Francis Thomas McDougall, with his wife Harriette, and another clergyman, William B. Wright. The group was invited by Rajah James Brooke, through the Borneo Church Mission Institution, and later fully supported by the missionary societies, SPG/ USP, and CMS. From the work of the two priests, and their successors, the Anglican Church has developed to what it is now: Saint Thomas' Cathedral, 27 parishes, over 150 Chapels, about 80 priests, about 120,000 worshippers and over 40 primary church schools and 8 secondary church schools. The four main languages used in Church services are: English, Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia and Iban. In 1996 the four Dioceses: Kuching and Brunei; Sabah; West Malaysia; Singapore, formed a new Province of South East Asia in the Anglican Communion. The Most Rev John Chew, Bishop of Singapore is the present Archbishop.

At the time of writing Jennifer has been in Kuching for over a year. She is living in one of the units of the Clergy Flats in the vicinity of Saint Thomas' Cathedral, and her presence creates much awareness of the existence of the religious life in the Anglican Church. Her main ministries are supporting the pastoral needs of the Cathedral: home visits; hospital chaplaincy; leading quiet days; prayer requests; spiritual direction; leading a regular Bible study for a group of teenagers and for the Cathedral Women's Fellowship, and other ad hoc activities. In September 2007 she was appointed as the Chaplain of the Kuching Diocesan Women's Fellowship. In this capacity she hopes to visit all the 27 parishes, comprising about 87 branches of the Fellowship in Sarawak and Brunei. She is excited at this opportunity to learn and to share in the lives of the women in the Diocese. Both **Helen Julian** and **Joyce** have visited Kuching this year.

## ◆◆ Summer Festivals

For quite a number of years, the brothers and sisters of the First Order have had a presence at various summer music and arts festivals, both secular and Christian. This year, **Oswin Paul** attended the



*CSF began a new venture in Leicester Diocese in July. The Bishop of Leicester welcomed **Moyra** and **Christine James** at a service at St Gabriel's Church, the parish where they are based.*

Glastonbury Festival (a rather muddy event) and Soul Survivor; **Beverley** and **Liz** attended New Wine; and **Christine James**, **Hugh**, **Jenny Tee** and **Maureen** were at Greenbelt.

## ◆ New Wine

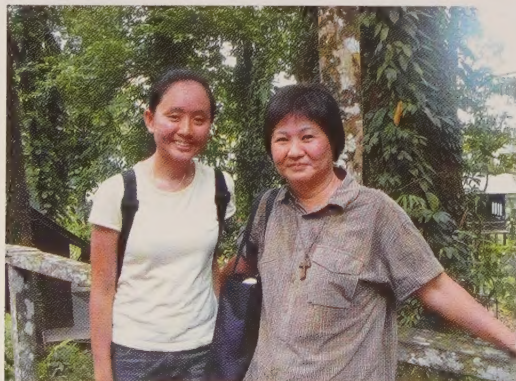
*Liz writes:*

New Wine is a Christian Conference, its ethos being "to equip churches to see Jesus' kingdom grow". It is attended by individuals, and church and other groups seeking to learn together, to worship together and to be renewed in body, mind and spirit.

Beverley and I attended this year's conference and it's incredible how two people in brown habits can be noticed amongst about 6500 people! It was an amazing opportunity to be a visible witness and presence among so many. We had many fascinating conversations about 'who' or 'what' we were and were able to talk to people about the Franciscan way of life, as we shared a little of our own 'faith' journeys and as we listened and shared in the stories of those we met.

The highlights for me were the opportunities to attend seminars on a wide range of subjects and to be a part of the awesome experience of worshipping with so many people.

One of the themes that emerged for me was that of the need to 'slow down, to be still and to listen attentively to the voice of God'. It was a reminder to hold on to the important witness that our lives rooted in prayer can offer in an increasingly frenetic and secular society. The early morning Bible study on the Exodus was a reminder of how often the refining that takes place in our journey of faith, takes place in those desert places. The main Bible study of the day based on several 'Great Commissions', was led with great passion and emphasised that our commissioning



***Jennifer Chan** (on the right) with **Jasmine Wong**, a Cathedral Sunday School teacher.*



for service comes from the position of our love for the Lord and from the knowledge that the Lord loves us. The speaker's message reminded us of how easy it was to drift away, to forget our original calling and of the need to "come back to our first love" - to re-root and re-establish our relationship with the Lord.

Finally Baroness Cox, one of the evening speakers talking about the work of the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, an organisation that aims to give aid to people suffering oppression and persecution - people forgotten by the West, overlooked by the media and neglected by major non-governmental organisations. She has travelled the world and survived many life-threatening situations. She has been shot at, witnessed scenes of carnage, entered active conflict zones, and crossed restricted borders covertly. Her life over the last 20 years sounds like the script for a James Bond movie - it certainly doesn't sound like the life of a Baroness. "My passion," she explains simply, "is to make a difference." For more see [www.hart-uk.org](http://www.hart-uk.org)

So all in all it was a pretty good week and there was plenty of evidence of the Lord's work in people's lives.

## ◆◆ Greenbelt

**Jenny Tee** writes: *In Heaven in Ordinary*. Streams of red balloons in a cloudless sky, expressing the prayers of thousands at the festival communion. Music into the night, from Tavener to Delirious? to Billy Bragg. Visual arts, literature, comedy and circus. A talks programme billed as 'the sound of a better world being born', Visits from new and seasoned campaigners. Worship, with a few, and in a crowd. The surprise of glorious weather after a summer of wet weekends. A festival of tents bathed in moonlight. All this was Greenbelt 07: four days of inspiration and an invitation to find *Heaven in Ordinary*. Our community of Franciscans and friends, and many visitors, celebrated daily offices and eucharist at our tented home on one of the campsites, our chapel also offering a quiet space throughout the day. The highlights for me? The extraordinary gathering, happening and dispersing of a community of 20,000, and the many conversations that just happened. Morning Prayer with the panoramic backdrop of the day beginning across the festival site.

## ◆◆ Unlocking the Black Box

**Chris** works as a development officer and deafblind manual interpreter. Here she writes about her work:

Some months ago, I visited Ben, a middle-aged man living in sheltered accommodation in a suburb of London. Ben had been deaf for a couple of years, but his sight had decreased suddenly

leaving him without communication and totally isolated in what he could only describe as a secure black box.

When I visited Ben for the first time, I quickly discovered there was no point in speaking to him. Touch was the only way to build communication. Having taught him a tactile alphabet spelt on to his hand, I was then able to gain information from him and give him the kind of choices he was entitled to. For Ben, the black box imprisoning him was unlocked within a half-hour. But it had been months before this could happen. In the meantime, Ben had become physically weak through lack of exercise, and thoroughly depressed through lack of stimulation. Thankfully, his Braille reading skills are improving quickly, and he will soon be able to read local and national news in a simplified Braille newspaper.

Edith was in a similar situation. I met her when I was called to one of the London Hospitals. A tiny elderly lady, Edith was sitting in a chair locked away from society in deep gloom and depression. At one time she had been able to lipread, but now with her sight almost gone, she had no idea what people were saying to her, and she felt she was a burden to every



h u m a n shape she saw coming towards her. Immediately I met Edith I b e g a n spelling in block letters on to her hand; and after 3 or 4 visits, she c o u l d recognise just five letters. But this was enough to begin real and meaningful communication, because it meant that the speaker could spell a key word on to Edith's hand if she was not able to hear what was being said. The result was astonishing. Now with two methods of communication available to her, Edith became less anxious and her ability to hear seemed to improve. She was discharged from the hospital and returned home with a lot more confidence.

If a person is severely sight and hearing impaired, the terrifying "black box" can be their own four walls. Doorbells often present a problem to deafblind people. They may keep a vibrating pager in their pocket or clipped to a waistband, but the batteries sometimes stop working unexpectedly, and as a result, many people employ more dependable and inventive means for allowing people into their houses.

One man living in a maisonette advised his regular callers to invest in a room spray. This the caller sprayed through the letterbox, and Herbert - his senses tuned - would arrive quickly at the door knowing

exactly who he could expect to let in. I soon discovered it was best to stand back once I had rung the doorbell, because very often a hand - palm upwards - would be thrust through the letterbox. If the caller did not spell his name clearly on the hand, it soon disappeared and the front door would remain firmly locked.

In this last paragraph, I have tried to describe the lighter side of working with deafblind people. If I did not recognise this side, I could never have done the job for all these years. But I would be the first to admit that deafblindness can be life-changing, even life-shattering for the person to whom it happens. Generally, they are remarkable people with great tenacity and a resilience which is hard to understand. Working with them puts my own life in perspective. Working with them is indeed a privilege!

## ◆◆ Saint Clare's House, Birmingham

SSF has been in Birmingham for nearly forty years and it was with regret that the Provincial Chapter made the decision to withdraw from the city with the closure of St Clare's House in the spring, as part of a number of moves and changes in the Province. The brothers have moved several times over their ten years on the Ley Hill and Bangham Pit estates, as redevelopment of the housing has gradually begun to take place, but they will be sorry to leave behind their ministry there, particularly among young people: it is hoped that some alternative provision may continue following their departure. The brothers have occupied two houses and expect to leave Pool Field Avenue at Christmas and finally to close the main house at Fourlands Road at Easter 2008.

## ◆◆ Round up

**Clark Berge** has been elected to serve as Minister General of the brothers until July 2012: **Clark** is a member of the Province of the Americas and has most recently served as Guardian of Little Portion Friary, Long Island. **Peteris Zeltins** was admitted as a novice on St Francis Day, 4 October, and is known in community as **Brother Peter**. **Vincent** attained his Golden Jubilee of Profession on 17 October and a modest celebration for that was held in November; **Elizabeth** likewise celebrated 50 years in profession with a Eucharist at Compton Durville. **John** was expected to be ordained Deacon at Hilfield on 22 December. **Anselm** moves from Birmingham to Glasshampton on 27 December.

In Assisi, SSF has moved to a new address: **Thomas Anthony** now occupies a larger and more suitable apartment in a quiet lane of steps near Santa Chiara.

**Kathy OSC** made her life profession in the Community of St Clare at Freeland on 5 November f



# Hilfield Friary

## - An Update

Over the last year we have seen a number of changes, not least among personnel. We've had the funerals of Geoffrey and Bernard; Martin John and Amos have moved to other houses; Kentigern John and Oswin Paul arrived; Benedict came as the new Guardian; and Peter joined the community and was noviced on 4 October. As most readers will be aware, the brothers are now living in Francis House and Giles House adjoining the courtyard and have Leo

House as guest accommodation, and the properties 'north of the road' are being cared for by the recently-established Peace and Environment Project. How the Project and Friary live and work together is a "work in progress": relations between the two are very

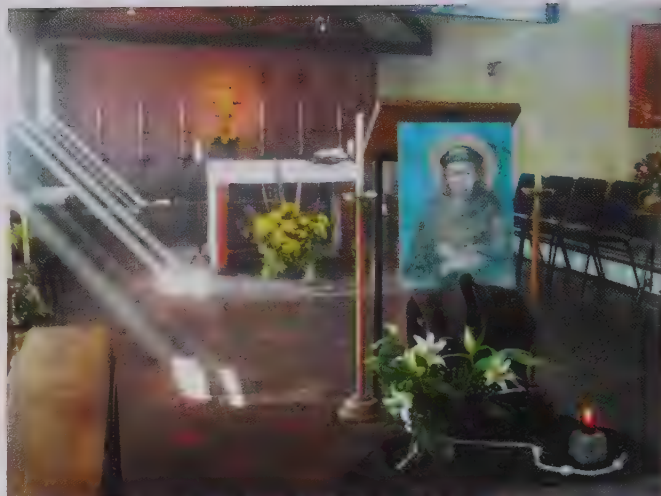
good and there are obvious common gospel and Franciscan aims, and we see these as positive directions for the future. Each relies on the other to a large extent.

The Friary is keen to build on its guest ministry so that people can enjoy the peaceful surroundings and community life, as well as it being an important part of our income - the bills don't stop coming in! Bart is a very keen Guest Brother. Kevin was ordained priest this summer and continues his

curacy in Cerne Abbas. With John at Westcott House for the autumn term prior to his ordination to the diaconate anticipated to be on 22 December, Oswin Paul is temporary bursar as well as the "odd jobs" man of the house. Kentigern John has done marvels in the kitchen, with creativity and a cool head. Vincent gently tends his "Secret Garden" and turns his hand to the occasional habit-making, and Raymond Christian looks after the chapel.

After all the changes and two deaths, we are also aware of our own fragility and needs, but look to the future with

courage and hope. We've maintained the annual Families and Youth Camps and had a very successful and happy Stigmata Festival, helped by a brilliantly sunny day, the congenial presence of the Bishop of Sherborne, and sticky cakes for tea! We preach regularly in local parishes, counsel, listen and look after a stream of visiting groups and individuals. "Down (in number) but not out" is a good catch-phrase for us this year! f



*The chapel on St Francis' Day*



*Benedict, who is Novice Guardian as well as being Guardian of the friary, presents Peter to Samuel (seated) for admission as a novice.*

*Below: three snapshots from the Stigmata Festival*



*John with a tray of "sticky cakes"*



*Oswin Paul and Raymond Christian with a helper*



*Bart in conversation with a visitor*

## Hilfield Friary Shop

Dorchester, Dorset DT2 7BE UK  
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**Open: Tue - Sat 2.30 - 4.30**

The shop stocks religious books, including many with a Franciscan theme. The books, some of which have been reviewed in *franciscan*, may be obtained by mail order but only if held in stock. A large variety of good quality cards, postcards, candles, sweatshirts, tee-shirts, gifts and Traidcraft goods is also on sale.

**Credit card facilities available**



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### Hilfield Families Camp

25 July - 4 August 2008

contact Mr and Mrs Mike Aaronson

(01483) 811655 or email: [aaronson@ddell.demon.co.uk](mailto:aaronson@ddell.demon.co.uk)

### Hilfield Youth Camp (13 - 17 year olds)

9 - 17 August 2008

Contacts:

If bringing a group - Andy Smith 7940074107

[andy.allyhyc@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:andy.allyhyc@hotmail.co.uk)

Bookings - Bob Bailey 01924 259966 [bobjess@btinternet.com](mailto:bobjess@btinternet.com)

### Anglican Religious Life 2008-9

Sixth International Edition

A Year Book of Anglican Religious orders and communities in the Anglican Communion, and tertiaries, oblates, associates and companions

Publishers: Canterbury Press, Norwich

ISBN 9781 8531 1814 2

Price £7.99



## Book Reviews

Ruth Scott  
**Slipstreams for Healing Souls**  
 ISBN 9780 281 0577 1  
 SPCK 2006, £7.99

"Working together as wounded healers is what creates community."

Using three recurring themes: ABC - self Awareness, Breathing space and Community, Ruth Scott proposes that when people come together and help to heal one another, there is hope for us all.

Throughout the book, the onus is on us, on the individual, and the self awareness that is so crucial to healthy and compassionate relationships.

She quotes Emmanuel Kant: "We see the world not as it is, but as we are", and acknowledging our inherent myopia, suggests that only through the lens of this self awareness can we be truly effective healers. She writes: "Our capacity to heal is proportional to our depth of awareness."

While the book is full of glimpses into various dilemmas that have beset the lives of others, the author skillfully uses these anecdotes to invite our personal reflection. Her psychological insights illumine our own dysfunction which all unwittingly keeps us defended from our own and another's pain, rendering the pastoral encounter anything but effective.

Each chapter focuses on the different experiences of our human condition such as the burdens of our past history, trauma, depression and the cost of caring. Some of these topics are illustrated with a Gospel character whose story of brokenness represents a specific area of human pain. The issues raised are explored with questions and insights which are relevant to our present day human distress. The author has "...come to believe that (these Gospel stories) can help us understand a great deal about the way in which we hurt today and the kind of healing spaces we need in order to find restoration."

The book is a treasury of memorable aphorisms and I highlighted many a gem. I offer just one which encapsulates the essence of the book for me: "Being human is not about being whole but about evolving in response to new experiences and insights."

I heartily recommend this book to anyone involved more formally in pastoral practise. Yet whether we find ourselves as counsellor or counsellee; whether relating as Sisters and Brothers in intentional Community; whether living alongside a chosen partner in a family setting, interacting with colleagues or simply among friends, the author's clear guidelines for reflective practise can help to steer all of us through the complexities of human relationships. This book's simple yet profound wisdom will assist any one of us in our life long endeavour of

healing and being healed. Scott hopes that by the end of the book we will have discovered a little more about our own pain and that of our fellow travellers and the different kinds of sheltered space that can heal and help us on our journey. As someone involved in pastoral care, and myself a pilgrim on the road to healing, I found her work immensely valuable.

**Catherine Joy CSF**

Ruth Burrows  
**Essence of Prayer**  
 ISBN 9780 8601 2425.2  
 Burns & Oates, London, 2006, £9.99

Here is a major contribution from the pen of a well-known writer on spiritual themes. The book falls naturally into two parts. The first half, eight chapters, contains her teaching on the essence, attitudes and practice of prayer. Beginning with 'reflections' on prayer, Burrows points up the essential need, which is to want God. She tells us that most problems arise from wanting self-satisfaction! It is a case of God or the ego, reminiscent of 'The Cloud of Unknowing', where the author warns that we must want God for Godself and not for God's gifts.

After a 'heady' beginning, the book moves on to "Prayer in the Trinity", reminding us of the presence of the Holy Spirit to assist and pray within us. Scripture such as S. John's account of the Passion and S. Paul's epistle to the Romans, Burrows tells us, has been largely inspirational for her own prayer. There is a gradual dialogue with the Word in prayer and scripture, through the Spirit of God. Our prayer is so poor but it is lifted to be one with the communion of love in the Trinity. So long as our constant intention is for God, the loving God who seeks us will continue to work in us though we do not know it. We cannot measure our own progress.

The rest of the book is a 'Carmelite exposé', comprising cameos of the four most famous saints among their members, and describing their doctrine and prayer, unique to each one as is our own. Following these Burrows gives us four short chapters on aspects of the Carmelite way of life, referring particularly to the writings of SS. Teresa and John of the Cross, and one called 'A Stark Encounter', offering her own experience of that life. She ends the book with a section entitled 'The Consecrated Life', addressed to vowed religious but equally applicable to committed and prayerful Christians anywhere.

The first half of this book held most appeal for me containing, as it does, so much teaching on prayer; while the chapters on the saints of Carmel were useful brief glimpses into their characters and struggles in the way of prayer for each. The last few sections might well have been addressed to religious and those with particular interest in the contemplative life, but nevertheless still have something to say to the 'lay'

Christian.

An impressive offering indeed, different from her earlier works, and well worth a little study.

**Elizabeth CSF**

**The People's Bible Commentary:**  
*A Bible Commentary for Every Day*  
 Bible Reading Fellowship

Gerald West  
**Genesis**  
 ISBN 9781 8410 1314 5  
 2006, £8.99

Loveday Alexander  
**Acts**  
 ISBN 9781 8410 1216 2  
 2006, £8.99

If you're tired of reading William Barclay for the umpteenth time, and Tom Wright doesn't quite speak on your wavelength, then this series of commentaries may be just the thing for you. Scholarship and devotion are here, lots to ponder and chew upon, and just enough for a day's reading to get you interested but not discourage you with endless detail or mystify you with obscure Greek or Hebrew terms. It would, however, be a disciplined person who restricted themselves to just the day's reading, taking around three months to complete each book.

These two volumes, together with others on Isaiah and Daniel, bring to completion The People's Bible Commentary Series in 32 volumes covering all the books of the Old and New Testaments. Each day a short reading of typically 5 to 15 verses is given two sides of comment and reflection. The authors are recognised Biblical scholars from around the world - Gerald West, for example, is a South African professor from the University of Natal. The comments do not shy away from critical issues, but are aimed at a non-academic audience, with an underlying reverence for the scriptures that you would expect from the publishers BRF. Each day's reading ends with a short prayer or reflection.

The price is very reasonable, and there are even vouchers printed at the back so that for every four volumes you buy you can send off for one extra volume free. Even the covers are tastefully designed and would make an aesthetic contribution to any bookshelf. For the thinking man or woman in the pew: altogether, a highly recommended series.

**Nicholas Alan SSF**

Geoffrey Stevenson (Ed)  
**Pulpit Journeys**  
 ISBN 9780 2325 2617 2  
 DLT, 2006, £12.95

This book will be interesting to preachers, because it is good preachers writing about preaching. Most of the seventeen contributors are white, male, Protestant evangelicals, but each of the two female and two black preachers writes excitingly



about discovering their own distinctive voice as a preacher. It is an inconsistent book. Some write about their particular call to preach and preachers who have inspired them; others write about how they preach and prepare to preach. Some write about evangelistic preaching to people outside church life; others write about preaching within the Christian community.

One of the major criticisms today of preaching as part of regular church worship is that it disables church members. Leading worship, talk about God, theological thinking and even praying are left to the preacher, and the better the preacher does these things the less likely are other church members to do them or to feel able to do them. That problem is addressed only by Steve Chalke (in whose congregation each sermon is followed by "The Sunday Debate" or "Grill the Preacher" - a discussion which lasts for as long as the preacher has spoken) and Anthony Reddie, who describes his inter-active, participatory method, inspired by the books of Thomas Groome.

The essays of Susan Durber and Anthony Reddie suggest books that could help preachers; James D.G. Dunn describes how he prepares for worship as he leads as a Local Preacher in the Methodist Church. Rob Frost writes passionately in defence of evangelistic performance preaching, comparing the enthusiastic reception of eighteenth century preachers like Whitfield and the Wesleys with the huge audiences of today's stand-up comedians and/or speakers like Charles Handy and John Gray.

Any preacher will get something from this book - inspiration, hints, new directions to follow, different techniques to use, renewed confidence to do things differently.

**Cecil King**  
Wolverhampton

**Eamon Duffy.**  
**Walking to Emmaus**  
ISBN 9780 8601 2423 8  
Burns and Oates, London, 2006, £9.99

The title 'Walking to Emmaus' refers to the sermon which the author preached on Easter Day 1990 in Westminster Abbey, on the theme of Jesus opening up to the disciples their own past as he interpreted the Scriptures. The 'opening up the Scriptures' is the underlying theme of the whole book.

Eamon Duffy is a devout Roman Catholic layman and an eminent Cambridge Professor. His subject is Church history, and he is probably best known in the wider world for his monumental work entitled 'The Stripping of the Altars'. 'Walking to Emmaus', is a selection of his sermons, most of which were preached in Anglican churches and college chapels. In his introduction, he

expresses appreciation for the service of choral Evensong, which formed the setting of many of the sermons in this book.

Books of sermons can be very dull. The spoken word can lose much of its freshness when committed to print. But this book is stimulating and inspiring, and is recommended both for devotional reading and for serious Bible study. In fact the complex arguments and cross-references are such that one can profit most by reading and pondering upon them.

The sermons do not always bring comfort and solace, and they are not intended to do so. The author is outspoken and challenging. In his Remembrance Sunday sermon at Oxford, he speaks of the danger of "instant canonization", whether it be of soldiers who died at war or popular figures like Princess Diana. He pleads for much more realism and discernment, though few would agree with his own verdict that Dr. Johnson is "the greatest and wisest" of all the saints of Anglicanism.

He challenges the increase of secularisation in society, quoting Pope Benedict XVI's words about Christ showing us the highway through the wilderness, but balancing this concept by quoting Cardinal Martini's words: "We travel in hope, not in certainty".

One can read, and then read again, this remarkable book, finding in it a great deal of food for thought.

**Martin SSF**

**Michael Mayne**  
**The Enduring Melody**  
ISBN 9780 2325 2687 5  
DLT, 2006, £10.95

This remarkable and moving book is a summation of the faith which has sustained Michael Mayne throughout his life and of which we had insights in his previous books, in particular *A Year Lost and Found* in which he reflects on his recovery from ME, and *Learning to Dance* which considers a spirituality for old age. In *The Enduring Melody* he likens the thread of faith running throughout his life to the cantus firmus, or enduring melody, in music - hence the book's title.

Michael Mayne presents the book in the form of a journal documenting his final battle with cancer - in fact the book was published just three weeks before his death in October 2006. He takes the journal format as a loose frame, often using the psalms from the Daily Office as the starting point of his reflections on a wide range of spiritual issues. While the descriptions of his journey with cancer are painfully honest, they are never self-pitying but he draws on his extensive knowledge of poetry and literature, and occasionally humour, to keep the reader's mind focussed on God. His statement that 'to die with gratitude for all that has been, without resentment for what you

are going through, and with openness towards the future, is the greatest gift we can leave to those who love us and are left behind' (p.250) is a fitting testimony to the life and faith of one of the great Christians of today.

This is a courageous book and one which should give inspiration and comfort to many people struggling to come to terms with life's most difficult questions.

**Beatrice King**  
Wolverhampton

**William Charlton**  
**Being Reasonable About Religion**  
ISBN 9780 7546 5635 7  
Ashgate Publishing, Abingdon, Oxon  
2006, £45.00

This book is not about whether religion is reasonable or about the reasonableness of any particular religion. The author discusses how we can be reasonable in considering religion, and the problems that arise. He also shows how a scholarly approach may differ from a popular one and explores the implications of each. One example will give something of the book's flavour.

Charlton tells us that as the invention of printing sped literacy across Europe there came with it a literalist understanding of the printed word. This developed when telescopes and microscopes came into use after 1600.

By the use of lenses and mirrors the world around and the skies above could be explored and described accurately. This was new knowledge, invisible to the naked eye, and it was spread by printing. Gradually people began to expect that what they read in print was an accurate reflection of objects and processes.

This led some people to read religious texts, and here Charlton instances Genesis, as an accurate account not only of the history of the patriarchs, but of Creation too. So the six days of creation came to be regarded as knowledge on the same level as the orbits of planets and the structure of plants.

Many people in the ancient world, and Augustine is a well-known example, accepted the creation stories in the Bible (and similar stories in other religions) as depictions of God's work and of how the world related to the divine. Believers hardly noticed discrepancies in the stories themselves because they had not been led to expect literal or scientific accounts. Of course they knew the difference between truth and falsehood, but they saw the truth of religious texts and traditions quite differently from the way twenty-first century people trust news reports or scientific textbooks.

This is just one example of the reasonable approach to a religious problem. Charlton handles many others and some are more obviously academic. We chose this one because of the current pressures of 'creationism' in some of our schools.

**Robin Minney TSSF**



# Francis' Credo

*Austin SSF*

If you have reached the back page by carefully reading all that came before, you will have read of how some people live their lives - their spirituality - based on or influenced by Francis' 'Rule for those who live in Hermitages'. You will have seen how even a Rule can be life-giving, and Francis produced several. His 'Earlier Rule', finalised by 1221, can be life-giving as well - particularly Chapter 23. Here, surprisingly, towards the end of a document primarily concerned with running an Order we find a very long prayer and an impassioned plea to the whole world.

There is not space to give the whole prayer but we can at least give the first three verses:-

**All-powerful, most holy,  
Almighty and supreme God,  
Holy and just Father,  
Lord King of heaven and earth  
we thank You for Yourself  
for through Your holy will  
and through Your only Son  
with the Holy Spirit  
You have created everything spiritual and corporal  
and, after making us in Your image and likeness  
You placed us in paradise.  
Through our own fault we fell.  
We thank You  
for as through Your Son You created us,  
so through Your holy love  
with which You loved us  
You brought about His birth  
as true God and true man  
by the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary  
and You willed to redeem us captives  
through His cross and blood and death.**

Those of you who know Francis' "Exposition on the Our Father" may be able to recognise his hand in this, for within this prayer you can see that Francis is giving his profession of faith. For it could be seen as an exposition based on the Nicene Creed. We who regularly recite the Creed, Sunday by Sunday, could also have our profession of faith in what, I hesitate to say, is a more attractive form than the Council

*God keeps us always in mind and  
wishes to have us with Him and so with  
Francis we can truly say,  
"we thank You for Yourself"*

elders of Nicaea left us, certainly a greater outpouring of praise and thanksgiving coupled with a statement of faith.

Francis' credo is really only the first six verses of Chapter 23 but the whole of it must have been dear to him as he used it as a glorious finale to his gospel plan of life, and it is amazing to find such passion and poetry, richness and balance. It is a remarkable achievement for "the little poor man"; the prayer is so completely and unwaveringly centred on God and humanity but, surprisingly, it is difficult to say which of the two is the main focus. It refers to the Trinity, to Christ, and to the universe all cast in the form of a hymn to the Trinity.

But whereas in the Creed we humans appear there only in passing on the occasion of the Incarnation and Passion, in

Francis' prayer we are as present in every verse as God is. In one sense this act of thanksgiving singles us out as the focus of God's loving attention. The prayer is centred on us, our destiny and our vocation. When Francis speaks of us, he sees us as the objects of God's eternal will. God keeps us always in mind and wishes to have us with Him and so with Francis we can truly say "we thank You for Yourself".

If we follow Francis in this prayer we will gaze on God with awestruck wonder, glimpsing something of the divine immensity of what he and we can see is not something shapeless but a reality showing "holy love" for us: a great depth of love waiting to receive us; that God loves us and in some way cannot do without us. God whose majesty Francis evokes by piling term upon term becomes no abstract deity but the "holy and just" Father of Jesus Christ.

Much more could be said of this prayer of Francis, of its Christological dimensions, of its universal all embracing scope; most beautifully in how he sees that all is swept up into the love of and for the Trinity. He ends his Credo with almost a 'roll-call' of the whole hierarchy of beings, heavenly and earthly to give God thanks and praise. It is a prayer that we can echo, a profession of faith we can assent to and a great hymn of praise to God that we can all join in.

So much of Francis' writings can be found to be of real value to us in our age when we look closely at them. Francis' Rule for Hermitages can be lived today with complete integrity and his prayer from the Earlier Rule can be our prayer and can be our profession of faith today as it was his all those years ago.

Based on 'Francis of Assisi, the Message in His Writings'  
by Thaddée Matura OFM

(ISBN 1 57659 127 1 The Franciscan Institute,  
S.Bonaventure NY USA, )

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